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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 000526

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [AG](#)  
SUBJECT: ALGERIAN ELECTION PROCESS UNDERWAY

REF: A. ALGIERS 338

- [1](#)B. ALGIERS 410
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Classified By: DCM Thomas F. Daughton; reasons 1.4 (b, d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Algeria's major political parties, except Islah, have submitted voter lists in all 48 wilayas for the May 17 national parliamentary elections. According to FLN sources, its candidates are older and more conservative than expected, and the number of women figuring on its lists based on the size of the party is low. The FLN "primary process," despite being billed early on as a hallmark of transparent democracy, proved to be anything but. A number of FLN members went so far as to attempt a sit-in at parliament to protest the final party lists, but were prevented from doing so. PM Belkhadem and current parliamentary speaker Amar Saidani are not running, fueling press speculation that Belkhadem seeks to succeed Saidani. The leftist Workers' Party has successfully tapped into frustrations on the Algerian street and likely will make the best showing of opposition parties. The National Democratic Rally (RND) party is hoping that turmoil within its primary presidential coalition rival, FLN, will lead it to victory. Betting that fresh faces are what Algerian voters want, the Movement for a Society of Peace (MSP), the coalition's Islamist party, is generally running political newcomers. In spite of the parties' activity, the elections do not yet appear to be generating much interest among most citizens. End Summary.

THE ELECTION PROCESS IS UNDERWAY  
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[1](#)2. (C) Preparations for the May 17 parliamentary elections are underway (ref A). Voters will choose a party list, rather than individual candidates, for the seats in their wilaya (province). The parties submitted their lists to the interior ministry on April 1. Under Article 113 of the election code, the interior ministry has two weeks to validate the lists -- which it has now reportedly done, though it has not yet made the lists public. Party contacts told us that all three members of the presidential coalition -- National Liberation Front (FLN), National Democratic Rally (RND) and Movement for a Society of Peace (MSP) -- submitted lists for all 48 wilayas, as did two opposition parties, the leftist Workers' Party and the predominantly Berber Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) (ref B). Based on conversations

with us, two additional opposition parties, the Movement for Social Reform (Islah) and the Democratic and Social Movement (MDS), registered in at least half of the 48 wilayas. While party officials declined to give the exact figure, we believe Islah registered in 25 wilayas and MDS in about 30. The "official" campaign will run from April 25 to May 14, with the election scheduled for May 17.

#### PRESIDENTIAL COALITION

13. (C) According to FLN Secretary General (and Prime Minister) Abdelaziz Belkhadem, the 15 FLN ministers currently serving in the government will be at the top of FLN lists. FLN sources told us that most of its candidates are over 50 and that the party will field just 74 women candidates (out of a total of 575 candidates on its lists, for 389 parliamentary seats). The FLN, however, is experiencing internal turmoil. According to press reports, party activists felt ignored in the creation of the party lists. An FLN MP told us that some of his party colleagues tried April 8 to organize a sit-in at parliament to protest recent party actions but were prevented from doing so by parliament staff. (Comment: FLN officials beginning last fall had predicted far higher numbers of women. They had also promised a fully "transparent and democratic" primary process. The failure to deliver tangible results and Belkhadem's hand-picking of candidates, predominantly FLN "dinosaurs," have divided the membership. End Comment.)

14. (C) RND Communications Director Miloud Chorfi told us his party planned to put two of its eight current ministers at the top of its lists. He added that 12 of the 47 current RND members of parliament would be running again and that RND

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would field 48 women candidates. MSP, with five government ministers, is expected to put two ministers at the top of its lists and will field 19 women candidates. According to interior ministry sources, 75% of the MSP candidates have never served in parliament.

#### OPPOSITION

15. (C) According to party contacts the RCD, which boycotted the 2002 elections, has put forward a slate of candidates that includes party leader Said Sadi (in the wilaya of Algiers) and a total of 35 female candidates. In an April 3 meeting with Charge, Workers' Party leader Louisa Hanoune emphasized her party's efforts to be inclusive of women. She said that women headed her party's lists in 16 wilayas and that women's names figured on the lists in every wilaya. Press reports indicate that newly-recognized Islah leader Mohamed Boulahia (ref C) will be running, heading up the "Islah" list. Some supporters of "former" Islah leader Abdallah Djaballah expect to run on the National Movement for Nature and Development (MNND) ticket or as independent candidates. Two smaller parties, the Republican National Alliance (ANR) and the Union for Democracy and the Republic (UDR), have presented a combined list, according to party leaders.

#### NOT RUNNING

16. (C) Noting in an April 2 press conference that President Bouteflika had been involved in the approval of the FLN candidate lists, PM Belkhadem said that neither he nor National Assembly President Amar Saidani would be running for parliament, prompting press speculation that Belkhadem wants to be the next president of the National Assembly. (According to one FLN source, Saidani may be named ambassador to a country in the Middle East.) MSP party leader and Minister of State without portfolio Boudjerra Soltani is also not expected to run for parliament. (Comment: Soltani

publicly accused the government of not bringing charges against corrupt officials in court. When Bouteflika challenged him for the names, Soltani provided none. While MSP's membership has since voted to keep Soltani as its leader, the party has sought to distance itself from his corruption miscalculation by not having his name appear on the party list. End Comment.)

COMMENT

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17. (C) The FLN is betting that voters want the experience and stability its candidates represent, as opposed to innovation.

RND is counting on FLN infighting to boost its electoral gains. The recent goings-on between the interior ministry and Islah have eviscerated that party (ref C and D). MSP and the Workers' Party, however, have carefully marketed themselves as parties for and of change. With anti-corruption rhetoric and 75% new candidates on its lists, MSP is seen as a party willing to give a chance to non-career politicians. Similarly, Louisa Hanoune and her Workers' Party have clearly supported expanding Algeria's political space to include more women and, importantly, Hanoune's party is perceived on the streets as having made an issue of the economic and employment challenges faced by average Algerians, many of whom are now standing in long lines to buy affordable milk (ref E). Nonetheless, while procedurally the election process is moving forward, all of this may be much ado about nothing: the elections do not yet appear to be generating much interest here among most citizens. Further, results of an on-line poll conducted by Arabic-language daily El Khabar and published April 10 indicated that only 5.36 percent of the respondents expressed satisfaction with parliament's performance as an institution.

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